

## Cambodian Cultural Profile

**PLEASE NOTE:** This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of Cambodians who live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients.

### Introduction:

While a small number of Cambodians settled in Australia in the 1950's and 1960's, the largest migration of Cambodians occurred in the late 1970's through to the 1980's. These arrivals came through the Humanitarian program as refugees fleeing persecution and war, trauma and torture in Cambodia due to the Pol Pot regime (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).

The majority (approximately 90%) of the Cambodian-born population are Khmer with the remaining 10% identifying with Chinese or Indo-Chinese ancestries (Vietnamese, Thai, Lao). Approximately 10% of the population lives in the capital city Phnom Penh, with the remainder living in rural areas.

In 2006, there were 9,791 Cambodia-born persons in Victoria (39.9% of Australia's total), increasing by 8.8% from 9,003 persons in 2001 and increasing to 13,591 in 2016. (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008; ABS Census 2016).

### Migration:

- Before 1976, the Cambodian-born community in Australia numbered around 500.
- Over one-third (35.3%) of the Cambodia-born in Victoria arrived in Australia prior to 1986 (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- By 1986 the Cambodian-born population of Australia rose to approximately 13,500 survivors of the Pol Pot regime, increasing to almost 23,000 in 2001 due to sponsorship of families under the Humanitarian Program. In 2016, the total Cambodian-born population rose to 33,152 (ABS Census 2016).

### Local Demographics: Cambodian-born residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total Cambodian-born Population	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Cambodian-born people aged 65 and over	People aged 65+ as a % of the Cambodian-born population
City of Boroondara	88	12	6	4	3	7	8%
City of Knox	536	131	92	37	20	88	16%
City of Maroondah	193	43	24	10	3	28	15%
City of Manningham	97	25	15	7	3	15	15%
City of Monash	468	97	48	30	6	56	12%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	36	0	5	0	0	0	0%
City of Whitehorse	453	117	93	35	24	94	21%
Eastern Region	1,871	425	283	123	59	288	15%

(ABS Census 2016)

- At the 2016 Census, there were 13,591 Cambodian-born persons in Victoria (ABS 2016 Census).
- 80% of the Cambodia-born hold Australian Citizenship (ABS Census 2016).

### Language:

- The national language of Cambodia is Khmer. 75.1% of the Cambodian-born population in Victoria speak Khmer at home (ABS Census 2016).
- Other main languages are Cantonese and Min Nan as well as Teo Chew, Mandarin and other languages (Department of Social Services 2015).
- English proficiency in the Cambodian community is very low. 33% of the Cambodian-born population in Victoria identified as speaking English 'not well' and 8% spoke English 'not at all' (ABS 2016).
- 20% of the Cambodian-born population in Victoria assessed themselves as speaking English 'very well' and 33% as 'well' (ABS 2016).
- Many older Cambodians have had no formal learning in Cambodia and as a result many are not literate in their own language.

### Religion:

The Cambodian-born population in Victoria identified as the following religions at the 2016 Census (ABS 2016):

- Buddhism – 10,100 (74%)
- Christianity – 922 (7%)
- Islam – 36 (0.26%)
- Hinduism – 7 (0.05%)
- Other religions – 15 (0.11%)
- Secular beliefs / other spiritual beliefs / no religious affiliations – 1,860 (14%)
- Inadequately described / not stated – 652 (5%)

### Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:

- In Cambodia, children and family members traditionally care for the elderly.
- Isolation is an issue for many Cambodian elderly in Australia, due to low levels of English and the lack of transport.
- Grandparents play an important role in caring for grandchildren.
- Intergenerational conflict can occur between elderly Cambodian-born parents and their children when they feel they have no role, or if they feel that they are a burden to their children.

### Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- Cambodian-born people regard disability as shameful and a strong cultural stigma is attached to mental illness in particular.

- Cambodian-born people may be unfamiliar with disability and mental health services, as they were not available in their own country. They may be reluctant to utilise mainstream services due to language and cultural barriers such as beliefs and being unfamiliar with modern medicine.

## Attitudes to Death and Palliative Care:

- According to the Cambodian tradition when someone dies they are usually kept at home for one to three days to allow family members to share their grief, have visitations and religious ceremonies.
- Following tradition the body of the deceased should be washed and prepared by the family, hands placed in prayer position with candles and incense. Sometimes a coin is placed in the mouth of the deceased.
- Usually cremation is preferred in Cambodian culture with ceremonies normally held on day 7 after the death and again at 100 days after as well as each anniversary.
- Traditionally after the funeral ceremonies, friends and family visit the family of the deceased and make a financial contribution (Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council Inc. 2010).
- For further information please see resource: Palliative Care for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: Cultural profiles to assist in providing culturally sensitive Palliative Care, 2009, Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne): [http://miceastmelb.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Palliative\\_care\\_resource\\_for\\_workersAug2009.pdf](http://miceastmelb.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Palliative_care_resource_for_workersAug2009.pdf)

## Customs / Values:

- Traditional Cambodian values include a strong family identity and loyalty.
- Cambodian-born people have a respect for culture and older people. Cambodian families tend to be very private and reluctant to discuss family issues or conflict with non-family members.
- Stoicism is a highly valued Cambodian character trait, reducing the tendency to complain about their health or services they are receiving.
- Modesty, particularly for women, is very important.
- Visitors to Cambodian-born people's homes are often expected to remove their shoes, however they might not ask.
- Accepting of food and refreshments when offered may break down barriers, open communication and build trust.

## Courtship, Marriage and Child-rearing:

- Arranged marriages are still common amongst Cambodians, as well as men choosing their wives with parental consent.
- A dowry is expected to be paid to the bride's parents when marrying.
- Divorce rates are low as divorce is considered shameful, especially for women.
- Girls have more restrictions than boys and males tend to make the decisions in families.
- Traditionally children often are left at home alone when their parents work and the eldest is often responsible for looking after younger siblings.

## Communication Styles:

- Cambodian-born people regard touching people on the head or pointing feet or shoes at them as offensive. Cambodians consider it impolite to make eye contact with someone who is older or considered a superior.
- Cambodians have a tendency not to question instructions or authority.
- 'Yes' may be an ambiguous response to a question or request, and does not necessarily indicate agreement. Responses that might mean 'no' include; no response, changing the subject, or statements such as 'it's OK' or 'no problem' or even an unconvincing 'yes'.
- It may take time to develop working relationships, trust and rapport.
- Loud or over-familiar behaviour towards others is generally not favoured. Cambodians tend to avoid showing anger or getting involved in confrontation.

## Naming Conventions:

- Cambodians prefer to be addressed using their correct title. For example Mr, Mrs and Dr.
- Women traditionally retain their own family names on marriage or they may have two surnames. Cambodian names are traditionally written with the surname first, followed by the given name. Some Cambodians have adopted the Australian style of naming.
- Cambodians may not recognise their names if they are pronounced incorrectly.
- Cambodians may not always address people by their name.

## Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Cambodians have traditionally dealt with illness through self-care and self-medication.
- Spiritual healers may be sought for illnesses thought to be caused by spirits.
- Herbal remedies may be used in conjunction with, or as an alternative to, western medicines. Pinching, or rubbing (also known as coining) are common remedies for a range of ailments. They can result in bruises or marks on the forehead, the abdomen and the base of the nose, between the eyes and on the neck, chest or back. It is important not to mistake these marks as a sign of abuse.
- Many Cambodians have suffered enormous physical and psychological trauma in their country of origin. This may result in jumpy reactions to sudden noises, memory and concentration problems, and extreme reactions to minor stresses.

## Greetings:

English Greeting	Khmer	Closest English Pronunciation
Hello	jchum reip suer	CHUM REAP SUER
Goodbye	chum reap lhear	CHUM REAP LEAR
Yes	cha (female) / baht (male)	JA (female) / BAA (male)
No	They	TH'E
Thankyou	Or kun	OR KUN

## Key Cambodian Festivals / Significant Dates:

Cambodians traditionally follow the Lunar Calendar.

- Retreat of the Monk (Buddhist) *September (a number of weeks)*
- Chaul Chanam (Cambodian New Year) *13<sup>th</sup> April (lasts for 3 days)*
- Bonn Phchum Ben (Ancestor's Day) *late September/early October*
- Lunar New Year (ethnic Chinese) *1st day of the 1st Lunar Month*

## Local services useful for Cambodian-born residents in the Eastern Region

### Settlement Services

Provide information, referral and casework for refugees and family migrants who arrived in the last five years.

Name	Address	Contact
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, 3128 <u>and</u> 18 Bond Street, Ringwood 3134	Ph: 9285 4888 (Box Hill) 9870 1351 (Ringwood)
New Hope Foundation	Grattan Gardens Community Centre 40 Grattan Street, Prahran 3181	Ph: 9510 5877

## Khmer/Cambodian Support Services and Resources

### **Cambodian Association of Victoria**

Address: 42 Queens Avenue, Springvale 3172

Ph: 9546 3466

Email: [admin@cav.net.au](mailto:admin@cav.net.au)

Website: [www.cav.net.au](http://www.cav.net.au)

The Association is a voluntary community based, non-profit, non-political, non-sectarian and non-religious organisation. Its membership is open to any person who pays a membership fee and abide by its constitution. It provides a wide range of welfare services to Cambodian settlers in Victoria.

### **Cambodian Buddhist Association of Victoria Inc. (CBAV)**

Address: 159 Clarke Road, Springvale South 3172

Ph: 9546 2432

CBAV is a voluntary Cambodian community based and is a non-profit organisation. Its aims are to preserve the Cambodian rich culture and tradition and to foster and maintain good relationship amongst Cambodians in Australia.

## **Cambodian Radio Program**

Melbourne 92.3FM (every Wednesday 4pm – 5pm)

Listen online: [www.3zzz.com.au](http://www.3zzz.com.au)

General local, national & world news. Community Announcements. Current affairs. General listening.

## **Migrant Information Centre Aged & Disability Services**

Address: Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128

Ph: 9275 6901

Email: [wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au](mailto:wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au)

Website: <http://miceastmelb.com.au/our-services/elderly-people-younger-people-disabilities-carers/>

The Access & Support Program provides short term support to help people access aged care and other services so they can continue living at home independently. The Program provides information, referral, support and monitoring. The aged and disability team generally aims to increase access to aged care and disability services for CALD communities in the EMR through working with CALD communities to promote those services, provide information and referral and supporting organisations to provide culturally appropriate care.

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